



Embassy of the United States of America ***Port Louis, Mauritius***

OP-ED

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"Honoring Women in an Age of Participation"

Port Louis, March 8, 2012: On September, 5, 1995, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a powerful speech at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. *"What we are learning around the world is that if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish. And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish."* she asserted. Well, I must say that seventeen years later, these words are still relevant as we celebrate International Women's Day around the world and as we continue to make strides for women's progress.

This International Women's Day, Secretary Clinton and First Lady Michelle Obama will host the 6th annual International Women of Courage Awards, honoring 10 remarkable women from around the world. These women have shown exceptional bravery and leadership in advocating for women's rights and empowerment, often at great personal risk. Their stories represent just a few of the emerging leaders found in every corner of the world.

On December 10th, 2011, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three extraordinary women who have led the fight for human rights and democracy in their home countries - President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen. Their achievement signifies recognition on the world stage of the essential role that women must play in the hard work of building peace and sustainable communities in the 21st century.

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Yet, as we rightfully honor achievements, we must also be reminded that International Women's Day is an opportunity to renew the call for action, investment, and commitment to women's equality. We are at a moment of historic opportunity. Secretary Clinton has referred to this era as "the Participation Age". This is a time where every individual, regardless of gender or other characteristics, is poised to be a contributing and valued member of their society.

Around the world, we are witnessing examples of the Participation Age. The Republic of Mauritius has its own success stories. The appointment of Mrs. Monique Ohsan-Bellepeau as first woman Vice President in 2010 is certainly a praiseworthy step towards the recognition of the role that Mauritian women have in the socio-economic and political development of their country. I also congratulate the Government of Mauritius' actions for the empowerment of Mauritian women, namely, the setting up of two national platforms to combat gender-based violence and for a better representation of women in politics respectively. I am also very pleased to see the determination of Government of Mauritius to support the professional growth of women entrepreneurs. These are goals that my Mission adheres to completely. In fact, through the International Visitor Leadership Program of the U.S. Department of State, we are proud to have sent many talented Mauritian women to the United States in recent years, and so, on an array of programs ranging from women in politics, women entrepreneurship, grassroots democracy, journalism, combating trafficking in persons to children in the U.S. judicial system.

In December 2011, President Obama released the first-ever U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, charting a roadmap for how the United States will accelerate and institutionalize efforts across the government to advance women's participation in preventing conflict and keeping peace. This initiative represents a fundamental change in how the U.S. will approach its diplomatic, military, and development-based support to women in areas of conflict, by ensuring that their perspectives and considerations of gender are woven into the fabric of how the United States approaches peace processes, conflict prevention, the protection of civilians, and humanitarian assistance.

Women are a cornerstone of America's foreign policy because the simple fact is that no country can hope to move ahead if it is leaving half of its people behind. Women and girls drive our economies. They build peace and prosperity. Investing in them means investing in global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for everyone-the world over. As we honor them today, let us renew our resolve to work for the cause of equality each and every day of the year.

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